UNITED NATIONS **DP**

Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme and of the United Nations Population Fund

Distr.
GENERAL

DP/FPA/1998/13
10 July 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Third regular session 1998
14-16 and 21-22 September 1998, New York
Item 10 of the provisional agenda
UNFPA

UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND

PROGRESS REPORT ON UNFPA SUPPORT TO PARTNERS IN POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Report of the Executive Director

1. This report on the support provided by UNFPA to Partners in Population and Development, the South-South initiative launched by 10 developing countries at the International Conference on Population and Development in September 1994, is being submitted in response to decision 96/09 of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board. That decision approved the arrangements proposed to support the intergovernmental organization Partners in Population and Development, as outlined in the report on South-South Cooperation: UNFPA support to "Partners in Population and Development" (document DP/FPA/1996/11). Further, the decision requested the Executive Director, inter alia, to report to the Executive Board at the third regular session 1998 on the activities and achievements of the initiative, including the role of the UNFPA, and on the justification for further Fund involvement beyond 1998.

2. In April 1995, the Partners in Population and Development was formally established as an intergovernmental organization by Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, Thailand, Tunisia and Zimbabwe at a meeting held in Harare, Zimbabwe. At that meeting, those 10 countries approved the bylaws of the organization, constituted themselves as a Board, elected an Executive Committee to approve and update the Partners programme and communication

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strategies, and adopted an annual budget and accounting system. In July 1996, at its meeting in Mexico, the Partners Board decided to accept the offer of Bangladesh to host the Partners Secretariat in Dhaka. The Secretariat became operational in September 1996.

3. In keeping with the Executive Board's suggestion that the Partners consider broadening the scope of its work by actively involving other developing countries, two additional countries, China and Pakistan, became members of the Partners. Furthermore, India is expected to become a member later in 1998 bringing the total number of members to 13.

4. The work of the Partners takes place in key areas of reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health, and population and development, not only in the member countries but also in a large number of other countries. The overall goal of the Partners is to facilitate and coordinate the intercountry sharing of skills and knowledge in four focal areas: (a) integration of family planning and reproductive health structures; (b) promotion and integration of sexually transmitted disease (STD) and HIV/AIDS prevention and care within the reproductive health structure; (c) provision of reproductive health services aimed at the special needs of adolescents, both male and female; and (d) reduction of maternal morbidity and mortality. The Partners Secretariat acts as a catalyst for South-South activities, but does not itself fund or execute them.

5. Since the beginning, UNFPA has been involved in promoting and strengthening this important initiative. For example, during the last two years, UNFPA has provided financial support of approximately $250,000 to the Partners Secretariat.

6. Additional funding for the Partners Secretariat operations and activities is provided by the member countries themselves and a number of international sources, including The Rockefeller Foundation, the World Bank, the Hewlett Foundation and the William H. Gates Foundation. Donor support for the Partners initiative is expected to increase in the coming years. A proposal has already been submitted to The Rockefeller Foundation for additional funding support for various activities, including staff salary support for the next three years. The overall budget for 1998 is $2 million.

7. In addition to funding for the Secretariat, UNFPA support to the Partners involves the management of the Partners trust funds and other administrative support for human resource management. The trust funds are managed within the framework of financial rules and regulations that govern the trust funds managed by UNFPA. The Partners international staff is covered under the same project staff rules and regulations as are applicable to UNDP/UNFPA project staff.

8. The linkage with UNFPA has helped the Partners Secretariat enjoy privileges and facilities similar to those of United Nations organizations. Practically speaking, the arrangement through the

provision of the laissez-passer has proved invaluable in facilitating the official travel of Partners staff. The arrangement has also enabled the Partners to better coordinate their activities with UNFPA field offices and UNFPA Country Support Teams (CSTs) and to benefit from the relationship with UNFPA field structures. The CSTs, for example, have been engaged in awareness raising on South-South collaboration which has helped many countries to understand the benefits associated with such partnerships. The impact of those efforts is reflected in the growing number of countries that wish to join the Partners.

9. Discussions are ongoing in the Partners concerning its full independence in the longer term. In the meantime, however, the Partners has requested to continue the current relationship with UNFPA which enables it to utilize existing United Nations rules, regulations, procedures and administration rather than having to set up its own.

10. A number of donors and foundations are cooperating with UNFPA to support South-South activities, particularly the activities of the Partners. The management of the trust funds by UNFPA has been administratively helpful to bilateral and multilateral donor agencies that have funded the Partners Secretariat through UNFPA.

11. As noted above, UNFPA played a key role in the establishment of the Partners' Secretariat in Dhaka. Composed of five professional and five administrative staff, the Partners Secretariat is fast becoming a central point for networking among member-countries, particularly in identifying collaboration opportunities for training, research, exchange of information and the required financial support. The Partners Secretariat has experienced some difficulties and delays in processing administrative and financial matters. The Secretariat will thus be strengthened through the addition of a Professional officer to facilitate administrative and financial procedures with UNFPA/UNDP, Dhaka. In addition, separate foundation funding is provided to UNFPA for a post to facilitate technical and administrative linkages between Partners, its funders, and UNFPA Headquarters and field offices.

12. A number of Governments, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development agencies regularly participate in the Partners activities. This collaboration provides opportunities for addressing reproductive health issues through sharing of experiences, skills and technologies, some of which will be discussed below.

13. Guided by the ICPD Programme of Action, the Partners strategic framework outlines a communications strategy that includes the collection and distribution of technical information relevant to South-South collaboration and its wider dissemination through media briefings, particularly during the Partners Executive Board meetings. Articles on the activities of the Partners

are also disseminated through such channels as newsletters and through the media of member countries.

14. Through in-depth country surveys, the Partners Secretariat is accumulating up-to-date country-specific information on policies, approaches and lessons learned in reproductive health priority areas. The Secretariat plans to expand its electronic database to include information on donors, member country programmes, and a list of regional and member country institutions involved in reproductive health and population. In addition, it plans the development of a consultant roster to provide opportunities for professionals from developing countries to play active roles in technical co-operation. The Secretariat is using the expertise of the International Council on Management of Population Programmes (ICOMP) to disseminate the above information on a regular basis through the *Partners Newsletter*.

15. An example of sharing information and technologies among 12 Asian countries occurred at a recent workshop in Dhaka. The workshop, which was organized by the Partners Secretariat in collaboration with UNFPA and other international agencies, examined some of the multisectoral approaches in population and development currently being utilized by some countries. The topics discussed included: improving the quality and outreach of maternal health programmes; providing reproductive health information, counselling, and, where feasible, services to adolescents; preventing the spread of STDs/HIV/AIDS; moving from demographic targets to community-based approaches in the implementation of family planning programmes; and sensitizing service providers to provide better quality of care. The workshop also discussed the policy implications for countries that have already achieved low fertility and are planning to deliver family planning programmes through integration with other primary health services. Such integration may help family planning programmes to become sustainable. The workshop resulted in several concrete proposals for South-South collaboration.

16. The Partners places special importance on working with civil society, especially NGOs. Several projects have been developed to facilitate the sharing of NGO knowledge, experiences and success in key areas of reproductive health. Recognizing the expertise, resources and comparative advantages of NGOs, and other national institutions, those projects seek to strengthen the ability of NGOs to facilitate expanded sharing and exchange with other countries, including the provision of technical assistance. For example, Partners has helped design a special project with Profamilia Colombia with funding provided by the Government of the Netherlands through UNFPA. The project deals with early and unsafe adolescent sexual activity. Specifically, the project supports training in reproductive health programme management for youth-related NGOs from countries in the Latin American region. Selected NGOs from other countries in the Asia and the Pacific region and the Africa region will also be supported through study tours and opportunities to orient themselves on the success of Profamilia. One aim of this networking activity is to demonstrate a

model of how reproductive health services for adolescents can be provided to promote safe sexual behaviour to prevent unwanted pregnancies and STDs, including HIV.

17. With the support and guidance of its Board and in close cooperation with UNFPA, the Partners Secretariat is moving ahead with the implementation of other action plans. A number of networks involving programme units and academic and research institutions have been developed and are already active:

(a) The North African Network on Prevention and Care of STDs/HIV/AIDS and Infertility brings together managers from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia to work on common projects. Another network has been successfully created between North and West African Francophone countries to work on reproductive health and population issues. It involves 12 countries from Francophone Africa and the Maghreb countries. Collaborative projects on reducing maternal mortality and morbidity are underway among Djibouti, Niger and Tunisia as well as between Mauritania and Morocco;

(b) The East-African Reproductive Health Network (EARHN) involves collaboration among Kenya, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania whereby Governments and NGOs promote information dissemination for adolescents on the prevention and management of STDs/AIDS. A similar proposal has been prepared to set up integrated maternal health and family planning services along the borders of Belize, Guatemala and Mexico.

18. Some of the key challenges facing the Partners are outlined below:

(a) It has been recognized from the beginning that the member countries themselves would play a direct role in organizing various South-South activities. However, it will take time to reflect this fully at the operational level. With that in mind, Partners has agreed that it is crucial for the member countries and other participating Governments to establish a focal point responsible for coordinating South-South activities and to make this focal point responsible for day-to-day communications with the Partners Secretariat and other interested groups. Funding from the William H. Gates Foundation is available to expand this mechanism of focal points in each member country;

(b) The Partners initiative has been successful in raising and maintaining international interest in South-South cooperation and is now faced with an increasing demand for intercountry collaboration and networking. The Secretariat, therefore, plans to focus on a few selected activities and to make maximum use of the electronic media. In

this context, the Partners has set up a web site and has an agreement with *The Earth Times* to disseminate up-to-date information on South-South activities related to reproductive health by way of organizing briefings and media events.

19. The creation of Partners is an important measure to improve reproductive health services for individuals and couples around the world. The Partners initiative recognizes that much valuable technical and programmatic experience can be found in the developing countries themselves. Improved South-South cooperation is both an important step along the road to self-sufficiency for developing countries and an important goal of international development. Thus, South-South activities in the field of reproductive health should attract substantial support from donors, international organizations and civil society. Indeed, the very fact that developing countries are exercising leadership in this field and giving it increasingly high priority through the establishment of Partners justifies renewed efforts by the donor community to meet the funding targets of the ICPD Programme of Action.

20. UNFPA has been successful in promoting South-South cooperation through a variety of mechanisms. One such mechanism, for example, is to emphasize South-South cooperation in its country programmes. Another is the establishment of four Centres of Excellence which promote South-South exchanges through training programmes for developing country programme managers in both government and NGO sectors. The Fund's ongoing South-South exchanges through its field offices and CST teams has also been helpful to the Partners initiative. UNFPA support at this initial stage is, therefore, crucial to strengthen the Partners Secretariat. In the next two years UNFPA plans to review the Partners activities and accomplishments to assess possible future support from the Fund.

Recommendation

21. The Executive Board takes note of the progress report on the activities and achievements of the Partners in Population and Development contained in document DP/FPA/1998/13 and approves the continuing working relationship between UNFPA and the Partners in Population and Development as contained in the report.